

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

[BEGIN AUDIO]

**INTERVIEWER:** ... Memorial Park in cooperation with Marianna's Cable Vision. The subject is Walter Jorgensen, veteran of the Marianna's campaign. And the interviewer is Daniel Martinez, historian for the USS Arizona Memorial in Hawaii. Good morning.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

**INTERVIEWER:** So you never had a favorite baseball team? But you moved to Los Angeles [INDISCERNIBLE].

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** The Dodgers followed me.

**INTERVIEWER:** What were your parent's names?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** My father's name was Alfred Jorgensen and my mother's name was Christine Jorgensen.

**INTERVIEWER:** And how many children in the family?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** They had three boys. Myself and two brothers.

**INTERVIEWER:** And you were where in the ... ?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I was the youngest.

**INTERVIEWER:** You were the youngest? How many of your family members still survive today?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Myself and the brother next to me only.

**INTERVIEWER:** Since you moved what town did you actually grow up in?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** In San Pedro, California which is a Los Angeles harbor.

**INTERVIEWER:** And you went to grammar school there?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I went to grammar ... . I went through K through 12 there.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay and high school was which?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** San Pedro High School.

**INTERVIEWER:** San Pedro High School. That was the home of the Pacific fleet.

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** That's true.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you remember watching them and ... ?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh very much so. I was a very active man who was in command of a ship there. You know [INDISCERNIBLE] older man and used to go to sea with the fleet when I was a kid.

**INTERVIEWER:** No kidding.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Mm hmm.

**INTERVIEWER:** Battleship or ... ?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No. I was on a USS [PH] Algoma. A fleet tug. And my good friend was a skipper and I was sort of the mascot. I was eight or nine years old.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you had this navy thing in your blood for a long time.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Way back.

**INTERVIEWER:** Because your dad was a master of a ship as well right?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Right.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's pretty interesting. What was Los Angeles like in those early days?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well Los Angeles of course was a much smaller town but I wasn't that familiar with Los Angeles because it was 20 miles away.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you ever take the red cars into town?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh yeah I rode the red cars a great deal.

**INTERVIEWER:** Well what was San Pedro like then?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** It was a charming town divided up into ethnic groups.

**INTERVIEWER:** What kind of ethnic groups were there?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh about 20%, 25% Japanese for one thing from Terminal Island over there.

**INTERVIEWER:** Fishing fleets.

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Broken down [BREAK IN RECORDING] and farmers. Farmed the [INDISCERNIBLE] peninsula.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah truck farmers.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Right. There were no houses there then. And we had a big Slavic group from Yugoslavia. Croatians and Slovenians and so on. And then we had a big Scandinavian group of which I was a part. And then there were a few English-Irish but not very many. And a good [INDISCERNIBLE] of Italian. It was a melting pot.

**INTERVIEWER:** Of course where there Hispanic-Americans, Mexican-Americans in that area?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Some. Not very many.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did all of this work? Did it work well?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** It worked beautifully.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah. They got along?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** There were no gang wars or no animosity between groups. We were all very friendly with one another and ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** Well San Pedro's quite different in that area today.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** It is. Very much so.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did you come about ... . I guess a natural extension of being with the navy when did you decide to go into the navy?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well I kind of decided to go into the marine core. I really hadn't mind going into the navy and I enlisted in the marine core reserve when I was 17.

**INTERVIEWER:** And what year was that?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** 1938. Because there were appointments available for the naval academy from that source. And then they mobilized the reserve right away and being as I was in college at that point so being in college I was transferred out

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

because I was also enrolled in a [INDISCERNIBLE] class which was a marine core officers procurement program that was in effect prior to World War II. So I finished the first two years of college and then went to platoon leaders class in '40. And then a second class was in '41 and we were ... . We finished our training in August of '41 and it was a rather nice, elite group of young people. And it was at the San Diego marine core [INDISCERNIBLE]. We wondered why they let us go. The war was raging in Europe and so on. But they did and I went back to college. And then when war was declared I was ordered to active duty immediately.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right. Where were you going to school at the time?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Occidental College.

**INTERVIEWER:** Occidental College. I've been there. I know it.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Nice school.

**INTERVIEWER:** Very nice school. A traditional looks of eastern schools with architecture and such.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yeah. Lovely school.

**INTERVIEWER:** Well the clouds of war are gathering in the Pacific. Did you and your fellow reservists have any ideas or talk about what was going to happen out there?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh a great deal. It was a 100% volunteer organization group and you know sort of inclined to the military we wouldn't have been there. And we knew that we were going to get in the war or felt we would soon but we had no idea when.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have a pretty good strong feeling who that opponent would be?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh sure the Japanese were the obvious enemy. But we didn't know we would be committed at the Pacific either at that time.

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**INTERVIEWER:** Anybody have any opinions of how you could handle the Japanese prior to the war?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well I'm afraid we were rather smug about it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Thought it'd be over quickly?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well not so much land troops. But the navy thought they could polish off the Japanese in a week and it didn't quite work that way.

**INTERVIEWER:** They almost polished us off in us a day.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I know.

**INTERVIEWER:** Well where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor? Do you remember it? Do you remember where you were and what you were doing?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I do. I had been out to a college dance the night before and I had come home to San Pedro for the weekend. And my mother came into the bedroom and said we're at war, early Sunday morning at December 7<sup>th</sup>.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did she tell you where we were at war at?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh yeah. And then we got up and listened the radio. There was no TV or anything.

**INTERVIEWER:** You know the fleet was stationed there in Pearl Harbor and did any thoughts think about what happened to those poor fellows you knew on those ships?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh sure. Of course a good many years had gone by since I had out on that ship.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right. But all those majestic battleships used to [INDISCERNIBLE].

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh well I was familiar with all those ships because they were stationed at San Pedro prior to going to Pearl Harbor.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right. How long did it take the marine core to get a hold of you?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I got a wire in about a week and I was ordered to the [INDISCERNIBLE] navy yard to report April '42.

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**INTERVIEWER:** Had you ever been back east other than time when you were a child?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No I don't think so. I think that was my first trip as an adult back there.

**INTERVIEWER:** So what was your feelings when you got on the train to go ... ?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I was delighted. And I did get on the train.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right out of Union Station.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Right. And it was interesting. We were commissioned before left which is a bit unusual. They typically commission you after.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you were in uniform?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No. [INDISCERNIBLE] uniforms back there. And we went back there and it was the last class of basic school which was the peacetime marine core officers training school. And after our class had dissolved the whole school and from that time forward all the officer candidates went to [INDISCERNIBLE]. And it had been running parallel with this school for maybe a year at that time. So we had a very good three months in Philadelphia.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right. What was the train ride like going across the country?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well sort of a revelation. I remember [INDISCERNIBLE] sunset I asked the porter where the bed was and he said you're sitting on it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh is that right?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I had a chair car. I had no idea.

**INTERVIEWER:** No Pullman car for you?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No Pullman no.

**INTERVIEWER:** So stiff necks and all of that.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well I think I was too young to have that but ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** But the scenery. I mean America unfolds.

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh it was exciting to go back east and report in and [INDISCERNIBLE].

**INTERVIEWER:** Something that's lost on this generation is train travel.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Right I know.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you get back to Philadelphia and you start working. What were they ... ? After they got you there where did they ship you from Philadelphia?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I went to the Camp Elliott at San Diego.

**INTERVIEWER:** Back to San Diego.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** That's prior to the time [PH] Pendleton was operating and was assigned to the second battalion six marines easy company. And we trained there and put the regiment together. And the sixth regiment had just come in from Iceland – the regiment I joined – and we fill it out with personnel and went overseas in October '42.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was your job when you were at Camp Elliott?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I was the executive officer of easy company. I was the second lieutenant.

**INTERVIEWER:** I see. What's an executive office do?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well a rifle company has seven officers – a commanding officer, an executive officer, and the four platoon leaders.

**INTERVIEWER:** And so you kept ... ? You worked for the [INDISCERNIBLE]?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** You worked for the ... . You run the company from an administrative standpoint for the commanding officer who was a classmate, also a second lieutenant.

**INTERVIEWER:** Is that right?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Right.

**INTERVIEWER:** How old were you then?

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** 21.

**INTERVIEWER:** Boy a young men.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** And you had a bunch of younger men ... . What were the average age you think of some of those people in your platoon?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well we had ourselves who were early 20s. And we had three platoon sergeants who were possibly 30. We thought they were old me. But notwithstanding the average age of our company was 18. So it means all the men were at 17 or most of them.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you get shipped overseas. Where are you headed?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** New Zealand. Left San Diego and went to Wellington.

**INTERVIEWER:** Beautiful country – New Zealand.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Absolutely beautiful. I had a wonderful experience there. Heavy training. Guadalcanal was raging at that time.

**INTERVIEWER:** What kind ... ? I've heard this term – heavy training – and for those listening to this interview can you describe [INDISCERNIBLE]?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well we didn't work a normal week. We worked six days on and one day off. And you rotate that through that's a lot of days per month.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you'd be doing a lot of hikes and ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** A lot of field training, field problems, a lot of weapons firing and ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** What was the standard weapon for the marine core?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** At that time?

**INTERVIEWER:** Mm hmm.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** The 1903 Springfield rifle.

**INTERVIEWER:** World War I.



**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** World War I.

**INTERVIEWER:** Pretty good rifle though.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh yeah. First rate. But it wasn't quite like the M1 that we got later.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right. Well nothing's quite like that with the M1 [PH] guran we're talking about. Were your men trained? Did you have machine gun companies in there and mortar companies?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yes, yes. Well each rifle company has a weapons platoon. A weapons platoon ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** So it's not correct to call them machine gun companies. It'd be ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No, no we had a machine and company also. Each battalion has weapon's company that comprised of 24 heavy machine guns and four 81 millimeter mortars and presumably [INDISCERNIBLE] weapons but we never had much of that.

**INTERVIEWER:** That comes later.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well there were very few Japanese tanks [INDISCERNIBLE].

**INTERVIEWER:** That's right. When you say a heavy machine gun we're talking 50 caliber [INDISCERNIBLE]?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well we had a few ... . No. We had I think there was maybe a couple of 50 caliber air cool guns but 24 30 caliber browning heavy machine guns that is water cool. Plus 24 browning light machine guns which were air cooled. And actually we used the air cool guns mostly.

**INTERVIEWER:** In those early days was it tough to get equipment or was it ... ?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh it was a big problem. But we were fairly well equipped for the time going in.

**INTERVIEWER:** From New Zealand where did you go [INDISCERNIBLE]?

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** From Wellington to [PH] Numia. And then Numia into Guadalcanal.

**INTERVIEWER:** Was that your first combat experience?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** First combat.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was that like for you?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** We were all a little nervous. We landed within an existing parameter because the battle had been going on for two or three months. We landed in December of '42. And I went up on the President Jackson which was an APA, an attack transport, and it was a part of [INDISCERNIBLE] that was famous in the Pacific, the unholy four – first rate ships. The Jackson, the Adams, and the Heys, and the [INDISCERNIBLE].

**INTERVIEWER:** Now had the Battle of Salvo Sound already taken place?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** That had taken place about two weeks prior or three.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you came in when it was really still very touch and go there.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No to be fair it was touch and go because the Japanese had air superiority and so on but there was still considerable resistance on Guadalcanal and our men there were exhausted from both combat and illness.

**INTERVIEWER:** I talked to a veteran and they said – he was a replacement at Guadalcanal – one of our interviews here and said that the men looked like ghosts. They had lost weight. They're eyes were hollowed.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Absolutely. Our battalion relieved the whole eighth regiment. Our battalion took a regimental sector and was better ... . And we were better men than they were. They were just really decimated. Then we attacked and went north to Cape Esperance and finished the campaign off.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right. What was the fighting like?

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well like you know infantry, tactics squirmishes, and lights and ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** But jungle fighting is different than fighting in [INDISCERNIBLE].

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** It is but we had good artillery and good supply and we swept up the beach. Guadalcanal has a spine running down the middle of it and it's very difficult to get in on. And it was considerable rough terrain. And that was supplied either with men carrying rashes and ammunition on their backs, which was a big problem, or by jeep. And then we ran into an army mule train outfit and they worked for us and they were superb. Couldn't get anywhere.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right. It's interesting the mule trains were ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I never saw another mule in the Pacific later on. And how they ever came to work for us I don't know but ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** You had men under you and one of the responsibilities of having men under you is looking out for their welfare. And a lot of the GIs that I've talked, marines who were here in Saipan, note the officers they remember, the officers that took care of them and ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well it was your first concern. Not yourself but it was your command and your people.

**INTERVIEWER:** In a combat situation you're taking care of these ... . In an angle that I haven't been able to talk about until I've had you here is what was it like when you had your first ... you lost your first one?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** You mean attack?

**INTERVIEWER:** No death. Your first death of ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well it's devastating. But it happens ... . You know it happened regularly. We didn't lose all that many people but it can happen from a variety of causes. We had two destroyers and support I remember the first day. And

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

they had a couple of short rounds and killed one of our men. Accidentally of course. The Colonel's runner the first day. And that's a little shattering.

**INTERVIEWER:** Who writes that letter home.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** The CO. In this case he wasn't in my company but the CO handles the notification. But that is the personal notification. The official notification comes through the headquarters.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you ever have to write one?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh I wrote a lot of letters, regrettably.

**INTERVIEWER:** It's tough.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh yeah. Very tough. Not so many there but later on here.

**INTERVIEWER:** Your group which was – you were with the sixth marines then?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Right.

**INTERVIEWER:** Your campaigns were ... ? You went side by side with a lot of these other marine divisions, second and fourth, didn't you?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well in Guadalcanal we were a newly formed element of the second division. There weren't any divisions. I mean they were being formed daily or the units of them were. And so the first division was committed there a part of it and then the second division was committed there. But there was no third, fourth, or fifth, or sixth division at that time.

**INTERVIEWER:** Any near things for you there at Guadalcanal [INDISCERNIBLE]?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** What's it like to be ... ? I've never been shot at. Thank God. I hope I never do. What is that like? What's that experience like?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well you sort of roll with the punches and ... . You perform your duties and you hope that you're not going to get hit is all. And you don't expose yourself unnecessarily either but ... .

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**INTERVIEWER:** Right. Those bullets are whistling over. That's got to be ... . There was a Civil War soldier that said there was nothing more horrifying than listening to the bullets that miss you.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** That come whizzing by.

**INTERVIEWER:** Or listening to a bullet that hit somebody.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** The Japs had a number of 57 millimeter [INDISCERNIBLE] up to beat and they'd fire those down the beach and that was absolutely devastating ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** What did it sound like?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well first of all if you're lucky you see the flash if you can see the gun which is unusual. Then you hear the round go by and then you hear the nuzzle, the discharge of the gun going off because the speed of sound ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** Right.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** And the artillery is a frightening thing and that's understating it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes it is. It's a pretty frightening experience. There was one of our interviews said that he landed on the first night, got in a foxhole and the mortar rounds came down here at Saipan and he said that there's nothing like that – that kind of experience.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yeah there's no way to describe it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No.

**INTERVIEWER:** It's very difficult. Not to diminish the other things that you were involved in but could you just list some of the campaigns that led you here to Saipan that you were involved in?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well we finished up at Guadalcanal and Cape Esperance and about the condition of the operation. Things were tenuous at best. You never knew

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

when there'd be a counter landing or what. So the same ships came in and picked us up and when we went in we went in after dark and the ships were gone before dawn and when we left we put all our gear on the beach and they came in after dark. We loaded all night and we were out of there before dawn because of air raids. And I remember all the time I was loading our gear aboard and taking care of everything I was looking forward to those ordering two Fridays ... .

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Because they had excellent [INDISCERNIBLE] on that ship. I went back in the same ship.

**INTERVIEWER:** As compared to the kind of food you were eating out there.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well the average transport you don't order your eggs. You take what's given you.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right. But I mean in the field you weren't having those kind of ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh in the field we had sea rashins and we had I guess some K-rashins in those days. But we also had B-rashins.

**INTERVIEWER:** What are those?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** That's normal fare. The galley cook prepares the food. Canned goods. But nevertheless the bakery's baking bread and so on. We had quite little of that really.

**INTERVIEWER:** Now when you came to Guadalcanal you saw what those guys look like when you were [INDISCERNIBLE]. How did you look like going out?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** We looked pretty good. We were there I think maybe 60 days. Something like that. And we didn't have the exposure they had. And our trouble started after we got back to New Zealand. We had 99.9% incidents of malaria.

**INTERVIEWER:** How about you?

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I was one of the last ones to come down with it.

**INTERVIEWER:** What's malaria like? Is it different for each case?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well you develop a heavy fever, a high fever – 104, 105 – and then it subsides. It's periodic. It comes and it will cycle through every 15 or 20 days. Something like that. We took ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** But did you fellows have shots before you went in?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well you don't take shots. They had [PH] adebrain which was a chemical substitute for all the [INDISCERNIBLE] because [INDISCERNIBLE] wasn't available. And they frankly didn't know what to do about it. At first they sent a lot of people home. And then they realized that if you just leave them in their bunk for a month they'd recover. So they stopped sending them home about the time I came down with it. And I wound up in a naval hospital in New Zealand mob eight with malaria.

**INTERVIEWER:** Does that flare up throughout your life or does it ... ?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** They say once you have it you have it. And for the first few years after the war I had these tremendous headaches and I attributed it to that – that would build over a period of the week and then last a week and then [INDISCERNIBLE].

**INTERVIEWER:** Like migraines?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER:** Whatever campaigns were you involved in that ... ? Let's just kind of step it up to Saipan.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Skip. We embarked from New Zealand to go [BREAK IN RECORDING] in November of '43 and my battalion was a division reserve, second battalion sixth marines with Ray Murrey who was a major at that time. He was the commanding officer. Later retired as lieutenant general. First rate man. And we

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

stayed aboard ship on D-Day and we watched that smoke and bombardment. That was just something else. But any rate we landed the following day in LCDPs on the island adjacent to [INDISCERNIBLE] which was a main [INDISCERNIBLE]. And we brought in behind us which they couldn't get into the other [INDISCERNIBLE] and we [INDISCERNIBLE] then from there. And then we counter landed behind the other troops in the [INDISCERNIBLE] and got in on the sweep of cleanup of that. Not much combat.

**INTERVIEWER:** Any marine I've talked to that's been at [INDISCERNIBLE] said it was unbelievable.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** It was dreadful. Dreadful. Just devastating in every direction.

**INTERVIEWER:** And the marines that got killed there. One guy said he never got over the ... and still doesn't get over the vision that he was on his way in and he couldn't understand what all that was floating in the water. He thought it was debris and it was his fellow marines.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** It was terrible principally because of that reef condition there a lot of people were killed at sea, I mean in the boats. Because they stepped off the boats and some drowned and some were shot in the water. Anyway we then were the least affected battalion in the division and so we were ordered to make a forced march up the chain of that [INDISCERNIBLE] which is about a 30-mile hike and we waited between islets or [INDISCERNIBLE] and sometimes up to your chest and sometimes up to your knees. And I think in a three-day march we compressed the remaining resistance up towards the end of the chain and had a sharp, short fight at the end and pretty sharp. We killed about 500 Japs and we lost 34 killed and about 80 wounded in our half battle and then it was over.

**INTERVIEWER:** Real sharp firefighters.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Right.



**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**INTERVIEWER:** And where'd you go from [INDISCERNIBLE]?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well then we stayed there. The rest of the division meanwhile had embarked or was embarking to go back to Hawaii where we were to train and we stayed there for a couple of months. It seemed like forever but it wasn't. But there were no comforts. We lived in the sand or the ground and we had two or three air raids a night which shouldn't affect us because we were off of the main objective. I mean up the chain. And there was no counter landing of course. And then we went aboard ship and went to Hawaii. Went to the camp at [PH] Camouela which had been set up, rejoined our ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** What camp was that again?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Camouela on [INDISCERNIBLE] and we trained there for this operation, Saipan. And ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** Which is operation forager as I recall it.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Right. And at that time ... . Well I don't want to drag the story out but in my class 12 people were in the regiment and they were all promoted to captain. So there wasn't room for 12 captains. They didn't have that many vacancies. So they took two or three of us and sent the other nine home. And my colonel called me and he said Jorgy I'm going to keep you as my loading officer. I thought oh what have I done to ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** Deserve this right?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** And my all my other friend were going home. But anyway I became the loading officer for my battalion, second battalion sixth marines and I loaded the ship, the Sheraton, at Hilo and disembarked the troops here as TQM, transport quarter master. And then when the ship was unloaded I was supposed to go back to Pearl with them and then go home. And then a radio message came in to all the ships out there, and there were hundreds of them, and each attack transport

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

anyway had a TQM, maybe 15 and all TQMs were ordered ashore for replacements and that's how I came to Saipan. I came in about [INDISCERNIBLE] three all alone at nine o'clock at night with my khaki on. I didn't have [INDISCERNIBLE] or anything. No steel helmet. And I was ordered to report to [INDISCERNIBLE] headquarters for assignment.

**INTERVIEWER:** This sounds like Battle of Saipan by accident almost you. You weren't supposed to even be here.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** It does. And I landed about red beach too there about in that area. And I thought the [INDISCERNIBLE] you know that things would be quite advanced but there was a big heavy war going on that night and I went about 50 feet in and was challenged three times and I thought that's enough of this so I got in a big shell hole and I thought I'd gut it out for the night. And it was right opposite that little airstrip the Japs had – was right in front of me. And there was a tremendous ammunition [INDISCERNIBLE] there and the Japs got a hit that night about midnight or 1:00 am and it went up like an atomic bomb.

**INTERVIEWER:** Similar to the fireworks we saw last night or more so?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** More so. And at any rate the hole sort of collapsed on me. And next morning I reported to division headquarters and was assigned to replace a captain who'd been killed on Charlie company, first battalion 29<sup>th</sup> marines, which had been designated the second independent assault battalion before the campaign and later was redesignated 29<sup>th</sup> marine. It was an odd battalion. By odd ... . It was a first-rate battalion but it was not part of the second division. It was part of the sixth division but didn't become that until later. We were attached tactically to the eighth marines, second marine division and operated as their fourth battalions. There are three battalions. We operated as a fourth battalion. And I joined this side of Mount

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

Tipachio and took over this company that had really been in some very rough fighting and then we took Tipachio and ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** What was Topachio like up there?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well you're exposed up there you realize.

**INTERVIEWER:** It doesn't look agree to be a lot of vegetation from the photographs out there so it looked like a fairly open.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well it was all ... . Most of the vegetation had been blasted away.

**INTERVIEWER:** So what were the Japanese up there doing?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well they were out. By this time they took Tepachio and then they were down below on the reserve slope of it. And my company attacked on the right and swept down into [PH] Yeraipan and I think it was about another two weeks [INDISCERNIBLE] secure the island and ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** That must have been an amazing experience for you. I mean you had not been involved with a rifle company [INDISCERNIBLE].

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well it was, it was. Because you know I came in the scene and there were a lot of old timers left, the survivors, and there were three officers left out of seven.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did the men respond to you? I mean they had lost ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Very well. Very well.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's great. But it must have been ... . I'm trying to place myself in this position but I'd have a terribly uneasy feeling about going in there.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** You have to fit. The first thing you have to do is gain their confidence you know so you have to handle things right or else you're ostracized. But we had a number of ... . I'll never forget the morning of July 4<sup>th</sup> or the night of July 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

I thought if I'm ever going to have gray hair, it's tomorrow morning. Horrible night. I got up and got my little steel mirror out to look and I still had brown hair.

**INTERVIEWER:** Why was it such a horrible ... ?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well the Japs were all around us and it was a particularly bad night with close end fighting and all that sort of thing.

**INTERVIEWER:** Are you talking about hand to hand fighting?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yeah there was a lot of that. Sporadically a lot of it not ordinarily.

**INTERVIEWER:** You know no one talks about that. I've interviewed a lot of folks and when it comes to hand in hand there's something ... and I'd like to .... . What's hand to hand fighting like? What happens?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I didn't actually do any hand to hand there.

**INTERVIEWER:** But your men did.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Some of the men did. Well one of the officers that was wounded before I got there had a Japanese officer jump in the hole with him, a shell hole, with a sword. And he swung at him and this lieutenant grabbed the sword, tore it out, cut the Japs head off. And in doing so cut two of his fingers off grabbing the blade. So that's hand to hand fighting. But most hand to hand fighting is either slugging it out with a rifle but or [INDSICERNIBLE] or ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** Right. What about bayonet?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I don't think very many bayonets were actually in it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Heavy training. You had heavy training in bayonet.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh I know that. I know that.

**INTERVIEWER:** But it comes down to real basics doesn't it when it's hand in hand.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Real basics. It's nice to have eight rounds in your clip or pistol. One of the two.

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**INTERVIEWER:** But marines were trained in hand to hand combat also without a weapon right?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Right. But I didn't see any of that. I suppose it happened though I didn't see it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Hand grenades so [INDISCERNIBLE].

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** A lot of hand grenades. But of course if you're close in you can't use a hand grenade. You're pitched out ahead of yourself.

**INTERVIEWER:** Flame throwers? Did your company have any?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** We didn't have them at the company level there largely because of that terrain around Mount Tepachio I guess. But a lot of flame throwers were used on the caves here. And I'd call flame throwers in but I think they came in from the engineering regiment on call.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's a horrific weapon.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh yeah. Devastating. Devastating but effective.

**INTERVIEWER:** What's your most vivid memory of Saipan for you personally?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh I don't know if I have any one particular memory. That one night, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, was pretty bad. But I have a succession of bad memories.

**INTERVIEWER:** When you think of Saipan, and you may be sitting at home or maybe perhaps when you were planning your trip here, is there some thought that comes back reoccurring that reminds you of Saipan? Any impression?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well bare in mind a lot of the heavy fighting had taken place before I took over that rifle company. It was [INDISCERNIBLE] three or four or five or something like that. And so we swept down. Then we occupied Yaraipan and I stayed there about 60 days. So I have a lot of vivid memories of coming in alone at night and all that sort of thing and taking over the company and so on. But I didn't start with them. And the toughest days were the first days no question. Later on in

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

Okinawa I started from day one through the end and that was a little different. That was different memories there.

**INTERVIEWER:** I suppose it's a time when people kind of search their own, their inside. Can I do this? And I'm trained to do this. And I don't know these guys and now I'm going in a combat situation. Those kind of things crossed your mind and ... ?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh sure they're elements of confidence and you had self doubts too.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right. That must have been ... . And you were how old?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** And you had to set an example.

**INTERVIEWER:** Of course you're an officer.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I was 23.

**INTERVIEWER:** 23. You lost a few men here too.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh yeah we lost a lot of men. When we wound up in Yaraipan we had about 70 men out of 220. And of those a third of them were replacements including me. I was a replacement in effect. And we occupied the church of Yaraipan. That was my headquarters. And I told you about the status of our battalion. We were an independent battalion. We were detached from the eighth [INDISCERNIBLE]. And I stayed in Yaraipan as a company not a battalion and was surrounded by the 27<sup>th</sup> division and I reported to them tactically and administratively to my battalion which was way down by [INDISCERNIBLE]. And had many adventures there for 60 days that were more pleasant than the combat of course.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yaraipan. You know I drive down there. You know you walked down in the parade yesterday. What was Yaraipan like in '44?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** There was nothing there. The streets were identifiable.

**INTERVIEWER:** And just rubble.

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Just rubble. Tin. The buildings were tropical with tin roofs and tin construction and they were all down. And the Japanese had buried a lot of 100 and 500 kilogram bombs upside down. Dig a hole and stick the fuse, pull the pin, and put a piece of tin over it. You walked on the tin, up you went. And they were all around that church where I was.

**INTERVIEWER:** Booby traps everywhere.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Booby traps. And a lot of duds, 60 inch, 14 inch, 5 inch from naval bombardment. And I had a lot of interesting experience then but it was after combat. After the island was theoretically secured but a lot of people don't realize that roughly four or five thousand Japanese were killed after the island was secured and we had a war every night. When the sun set as tracers [INDISCERNIBLE] up and down those streets.

**INTERVIEWER:** So the activity ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Picked up.

**INTERVIEWER:** Picked up.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Because there were stragglers coming in to get food and minor attacks.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** So you were always armed to the teeth. There was no such thing as relaxing.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you witness any of the civilian populous suicides?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No. No that was up ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** You didn't see it? Heard about it but ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Out of my zone. Right.

**INTERVIEWER:** You said you had a lot of interesting stories that happened afterwards. Can you related what you think is one of your favorite stories?

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well at Tenapai which is just north of where I was there was a CB battalion, underwater clearance battalion. And there were hundreds of wrecks out in the bay and there job was to clear the harbor for shipping and build [INDISCERNIBLE]. And they had two enormous stacks of either dynamite or TNT. Each stack was the size of at least a basketball court. And the Japs came in one night and wired them up and one went off. And I was in Yaraipan what three or five miles away and the church, part of it let go. It was pretty well destroyed anyway. Some of the beam structures let go and they were swinging. It was about 2:00 in the morning and I thought this is it the whole thing's coming down on us. And then I got a phone call immediately. Go up there and see what's happening. So I threw together what I had. I had a jeep and a trailer. And I took two machine guns, two mortars, a couple of {INDISCERNIBLE} men, myself and my exec. And I had a tremendous exec – Les Bateman, a first lieutenant. And we went up to sea and the whole place up there was in an uproar. Middle of the night and troops, stevedore troops, were on the hills up behind there that were working the ships. Our people. And they broke and ran. They were a colored group. And they were in the water there. And anyway we restored order all ourselves. And I had my illumination with a 60 millimeter and what not. And we calmed everything down. And we were the only tactical people there see.

**INTERVIEWER:** So you shot up star shells to illuminate the area?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yeah. And you know we had [INDISCERNIBLE] fire power to have a small war.

**INTERVIEWER:** The black stevedores where in disarray because their job is to ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well they thought that there had been a breakthrough but what had happened is one or two Japs went in there and they wired this thing apparently. And two or three CBs were killed in any event. And I met some of the officers of that battalion. One was named Beta from Huston. A terrific guy. Very



**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

experienced in civilian [INDISCERNIBLE]. A lot of the CBs were that way. And he had a little problem. He'd come out with his battalion on a ship. And them men got into the beer on the way out and he was the accountable officer and had signed for 10,000 cases of beer and the men had drunk 2500 cases.

**INTERVIEWER:** 2500 cases of beer?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well it was a big ship and a couple thousand men so. He said I'm the accountable I don't what I'm going to do. I have to pay for this. You know when you sign you sign. And I said well how much does the beer cost you and he said about a dollar and a half a case. And I says I'll take care of it for you. You sell me 2500 cases for \$3 and you'll be even. So he said you've got 2500 cases. So I jump in the jeep and ran down to see my colonel and told him how about should we take up a collection. He says fall everybody out we'll take up a collection right now. So we had the only beer on the island.

**INTERVIEWER:** Is that right?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yeah. And ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** What kind of beer was it for those ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I think Pamps or Eastside or ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** Could you get it cooled or was it?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well my people, my battalion people didn't. There was no facility for that. But the CBs had a big refrigeration outfit and so we had cold beer at Yaraipan.

**INTERVIEWER:** Wow there's nothing like a cold beer out here I bet.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No, no.

**INTERVIEWER:** I'm sure there's a number of stories. That's a great story. Why was it important for you to come back here for this anniversary?

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well I have memories. I spent a lot of time in the Pacific and I actually thought I would like ... . I retired two years ago. I didn't have the time or money before really. And I thought I'd like to start a New Zealand [INDISCERNIBLE] on my own. And that would be exceedingly difficult and ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** Kind of follow your trail?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yeah it might [INDISCERNIBLE] even in a dream. So I got a mailing on this tour here, on this anniversary, and I thought it'd be a good idea so I just came. But it was a lingering thought to ... . I'm glad I came. It was a first-rate group of people and in our group there are about 90 of us. [INDISCERNIBLES].

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you meet anybody that you knew during that time?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No. No and neither has anyone else.

**INTERVIEWER:** So in a sense you've come to this kind of reunion and you've met new friends.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Exactly and now that we're about to go home tomorrow a lot of us have become friends and it's too bad that we didn't have an icebreaker the first day instead of towards the end.

**INTERVIEWER:** These things happen that way.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** But they're all first class people. They've aged well.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, yeah. Well you got your gray hair.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yeah I finally got it. It's brown isn't it?

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes sir. Come to think of it is more on the brown side than the gray. I'm trying to be diplomatic. There is on lingering story here that veterans have made a choice whether to meet with the Japanese or not. What's your feeling about that?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I wouldn't seek it out particularly but I wouldn't object to it. And I went to the Japanese memorial service and I thought it was beautifully handled.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was your impression of that?

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I thought they were victims in the whole thing just as we were in a way.

**INTERVIEWER:** Not policy makers but soldiers just like you.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh yeah. Well there were a couple captains there or what. There weren't many survivors but a couple were there. And I spoke to one. Said hello. I didn't get into a conversation but they were doing their duty it's regrettable that it ever happened but it did. But I don't hate them.

**INTERVIEWER:** How to feel about yesterday – the commemorative activities?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** I thought it's a fitting thing to do. I thought it was wonderful.

**INTERVIEWER:** And the memorial?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** The memorial ... I think it's ... .

**INTERVIEWER:** Is that what you envisioned for these guys that died here?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No, no. Of course you have respect and memories and all that but I'm very pleased that we have erected a memorial so that it won't be forgotten.

**INTERVIEWER:** Alright. Saipan's a much different place but ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh hardly recognizable.

**INTERVIEWER:** But overall coming back to Saipan you're going to have new memories now with these fellows. You met new friends and such.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yeah I'm amazed at the development here.

**INTERVIEWER:** A little different 50 years ago.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** It is.

**INTERVIEWER:** But then of course if go back to our own communities, San Pedro and all the places where you were in Brooklyn ... .

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** They've changed too.

**INTERVIEWER:** They've changed too.

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** That's true.

**INTERVIEWER:** And you've changed.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yeah regrettably.

**INTERVIEWER:** Maybe not. You're pretty reflective about all of this.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well all of us here are survivors. I don't mean just of here but at our age we're all survivors. In our peer group we're survivors.

**INTERVIEWER:** How do you feel about your contribution and the marines contribution? Was it all worth it?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Oh sure. It had to be worth it. And you know in the broad scope of things if we just laid back and said okay take it all, they would have – the Germans and then the Japanese. And the Japanese that was an entirely different government then they have today.

**INTERVIEWER:** So when you look back at World War II and younger people like myself look back at World War II what perspective should we have about it? What's the lesson you pass on to our generation?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well I don't know about being that philosophical but if you have a job to do you have to do it and you have to do it whatever is indicated at the time. I can't tell you what's going to happen three years from now but I can tell you what happened three years ago.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right well it's been a wonderful opportunity to meet you and is there anything that we haven't covered that you wanted to talk about or share with us?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No but it's interesting all the people that I've met here and in our group and everything and the second division stayed here. I left here and went to Guadalcanal to train with the sixth division which formed up and you speak to people

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

in this group and they all went in different directions all over the Pacific. A lot of people transferred here and there and a lot of activity.

**INTERVIEWER:** Saipan was really the beginning of the end right here. This was the decisive battle that brought the war to Japan.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well this was a sort of the Japanese fleet headquarters. At least for supplying.

**INTERVIEWER:** Perhaps this was the other Normandy.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Well I don't know. I'll make a comment on that. We were steaming into here on the convey all down on the horizon in every direction, a lot of ships. This was the big operation. Three divisions and assaults. [INDISCERNIBLE] coming right in behind. That's a lot of people and a lot of ships and the skipper came on the PA system, which PA system ran continuously one ship, and he said I've got something to tell all of you. I have announcement to make – that we landed on Normandy that day with an enormous force that dwarfed our force. And I looked around at all these hundreds of ships and wondered how ... ?

**INTERVIEWER:** How could it dwarf this?

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** No not that. But how in the world can we get our act together the way we have to do this. Because two thirds of what I saw around me had been built since December 7<sup>th</sup> [INDISCERNIBLE].

**INTERVIEWER:** It showed the tremendous industrial strength of this nation. Admiral Yamamoto remarked that he could run wild in the Pacific for six months but after that he guaranteed nothing because of the industrial might and spirit of the American people.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** That's true. They did run wild throughout the first year too. They were exceedingly successful.

**INTERVIEWER:** But in the end ... .

**USS AZ\_OHC\_#353\_Walter Jorgensen\_06-00-94**

Transcription Date: 09/27/09 – Transcriber: STA

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** In the end they were destroyed.

**INTERVIEWER:** Well I'd like to thank you for this interview.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Thank you very much Dan.

**INTERVIEWER:** And it's been an experience for me to listen to all these different things and in particular your story.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Yeah. Each person has a different angle.

**INTERVIEWER:** Everybody does.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** A different experience.

**INTERVIEWER:** Thank you very much.

**WALTER JORGENSEN:** Thank you very much Dan.

[END AUDIO]